

Discovering Army History

Story by SFC Lisa Beth Snyder

SINCE the Continental Army first sent captured British equipment to West Point in 1777, the Army has been trying to systematically preserve its history for soldiers and the American public.

"We have to focus on preserving the artifacts. One hundred, 200, 500 years from now, we still want those artifacts here," said Judson E. Bennett, chief curator of the Army.

The artifacts help soldiers understand their place in history and reinforce the Army's values and heritage in a nonacademic environment, Bennett said.

To maintain the artifacts the Army has a system of 42 certified museums, two provisional museums, 15 active-duty museum activities and six Reserve museum activities. And the Army Museum System staff also gives advice to the National Guard's 52 museum activities.

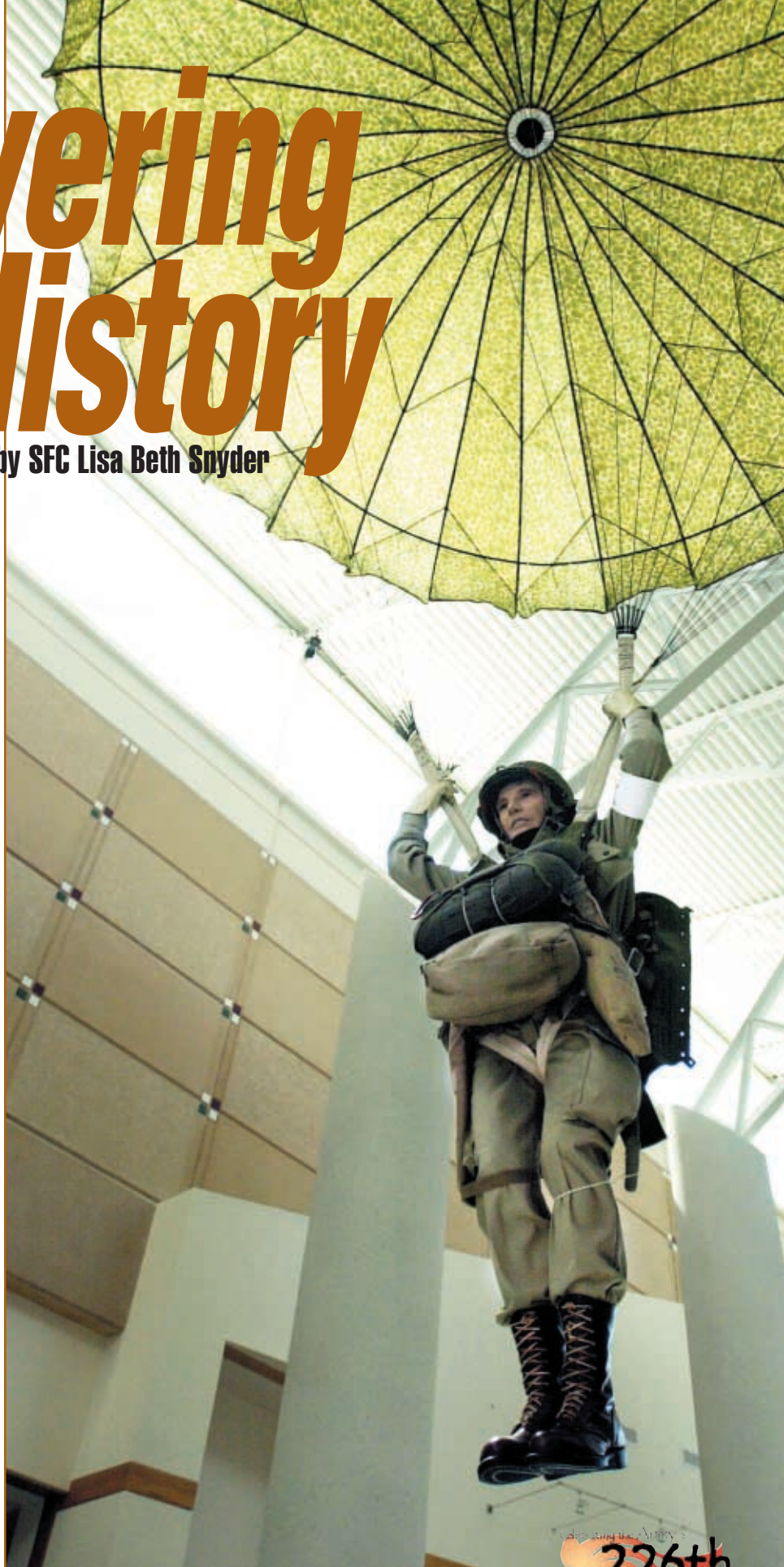
Certified museums have full-time



A C-47 wearing Normandy invasion markings is displayed at the Airborne and Special Operations Museum in Fayetteville, N.C.

Another of the museum's exhibits uses a mannequin to illustrate the equipment worn and used by a World War II paratrooper.

Anna Caudill-Peterson





Each of the Army's museums illustrates an aspect of a unit or branch's history. At the Patton Museum at Fort Knox, Ky., the subject is the history of cavalry and armored vehicles.

curators and the ability to care for artifacts, Bennett said. The two provisional museums are in the process of meeting those goals.

The museum activities, which were once called "historical holdings," are collections that do not have full-time curators or the facilities to care for and properly display the artifacts, and usually do not have the budget to move toward meeting those goals, Bennett said.

While the Army runs the museums, many have private associations — usually affiliated with a unit, branch or post — which provide volunteers to help run the museum and operate a souvenir stand.

These groups must give 25 percent of their sales profit to the museum, but many give much more than the mini-

mum, said Terry Dougherty, historical property mission team leader. This money helps the museums maintain their facilities and artifacts.

Army museums follow one of four themes — school or branch; unit; arsenal or post; and special interest.

"School and unit museums are where we see the concentration of soldiers," Bennett said. "The school museums are involved in the soldiers' training within the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command.

"If the museum isn't educating soldiers, it doesn't have a reason to be in the Army," he said.

Bennett said some museums, such



as the Fort Stewart Museum in Georgia, go beyond displaying artifacts and include living-history programs for soldiers. Popular activities include reenactments and staff rides.

"We bring this history to life for soldiers," said Walter Meeks, curator of the Fort Stewart museum. "It's an amazing story and it belongs to every soldier. It belongs to everyone."

Museums not only give many soldiers their first look at Army history, they share that history with Army families, especially when they come to graduations.

"If they see a museum that's modern and up-to-date, then they understand the Army takes care of its heritage and takes care of its soldiers," Dougherty said.

Army museums also serve the American public, said Alan Bogan, curator of The Old Guard Museum at Fort Myer, Va. That museum, which tells the history of the Army's oldest regiment, regularly hosts veterans groups, Scouts, church groups and retirement-home groups on tours of its two display rooms.

In addition to their educational role, arsenal and post museums are also documentary collections of Army equipment, Bennett said.

"We probably have the finest



The Old Guard Museum at Fort Myer, Va., highlights the long and proud history of the Army's oldest regiment, the 3rd U.S. Infantry.

technical collection in the world,” Dougherty said.

In addition to American military hardware, these collections often contain items from friends and foes, such as a World War II German Tiger tank and equipment from the former Soviet Union in the Patton Museum of Armor and Cavalry at Fort Knox, Ky.

Designers of military hardware often visit Army museums to study older military equipment to see if the good ideas from the past can be used to reduce the development costs of new equipment, Dougherty said.

“The arsenals’ equipment is our core collection,” Dougherty said. “They serve to preserve the technology for future planning.”

To meet this mission, the museum system tries to save one complete operational piece of all Army equipment. These research pieces are taken fresh from the factory and kept inside the museum buildings, Dougherty said.

“Many young soldiers’ view of history is what they see on TV,” Dougherty said. “The Discovery and History channels will give you a good overview of the events; however, we

want soldiers to understand that we developed the finest equipment in the world through trial and error.”

In addition to the school, unit, post and arsenal museums, the system also has nine special-interest museums, including the recently opened Airborne and Special Operations Museum and the U.S. Army Women’s Museum.

The chief curator and his staff are also involved in the planning for the proposed National Army Museum.

“The National Army Museum will bring all these things together,” Bennett said. “It will educate and inspire soldiers through the revelation of their past in a permanent facility designed to preserve and interpret the Army’s historical property.



The U.S. Army Transportation Museum at Fort Eustis, Va., displays a variety of artifacts, including motor vehicles, watercraft, aircraft, rail cars and wagons.

Steve Harding



Revolutionary War re-enactors of the “2nd Virginia Regiment” conduct a platoon drill during an event at Valley Forge, Pa.

Todd Post

Covered in History’s Dust

FOR people who want to taste the history of battle, living-history or historical re-enactment groups can transport participants to a variety of time periods.

Moving history out of dusty books and into people’s hands is the motivation behind Paper Dolls, a women’s World War II living history group, said Kathrynne Krause, who often portrays an Army nurse.

“We’re taking a trip into history,” said Todd Post of the 2nd Virginia Regiment of the Brigade of the American Revolution. “This is finding a venue of discovering how it actually felt like. We do get an insight into the day-to-day life of those soldiers.”

Insight into the roles women played in an earlier era attracted Krause to re-enacting. During re-enactments, her group portrays nurses, messengers, drivers and clerks “to be of practical use to the situation.”

Paper Dolls also sets up displays, which allows the group to portray other women from the era, such as the Women’s Auxiliary Service Pilots who ferried aircraft from the factories to the airfields, she said.

“Everywhere you looked, there were women in uniform. And it was World War II that called them to duty,” she said.

These two groups and many others seek to educate the public about soldiers’ lives or specific battles during various times in our nation’s history. To find a living-history group anywhere in the world, search for “re-enactments” on the World Wide Web.

— SFC Lisa Beth Snyder



The U.S. Army Quartermaster Museum at Fort Lee, Va., attracts military and civilian visitors from throughout the eastern United States.

Jim Bolton



The U.S. Army Women's Museum at Fort Lee opened in May to showcase the efforts of American women in defense of the nation.



Jim Bolton (both)

This exhibit at the museum portrays females soldiers' living conditions in a wooden barracks building early in World War II.

Tracking History

BECAUSE of all the items in Army museums and in storage, the Army Museum System has the largest property book in the Army, said Terry Dougherty, historical property mission team leader.

The organization has created software to track all the items in its possession, and the software has information beyond that found in the average property book.

"For each item, it is like having a personnel record or medical record," said Judson E. Bennett, chief curator of the Army.

This information is necessary because the system follows not just Army property-accounting procedures, but also established museum practices of cataloging and maintaining items.

"Our collections have a lot of interesting objects donated by people who served in the Army," Dougherty said.

While soldiers have always collected things and later turned them over to the Army's historical collection, there is one category of items that usually doesn't make it into the Army's hands — uniforms of the soldiers who fought the battles.

"That private who went down that ramp on Omaha beach, we don't have that uniform," Dougherty said.

This is true of most uniforms, except general officers' uniforms, up to those worn in the last 10 years. The museum system now works with historical detachments to collect the uniforms of soldiers from recent missions.

The provenance of an item is very important to the museum system.

"We work every day to make a link between an artifact and its time," Dougherty said. "If we get a photo of an item, we can identify it."

While uniforms are in short supply, there are other items, such as AK-47 rifles from Desert Storm, that the Army and the other services have in abundance, Dougherty said. These items may be given or lent to such nonprofit museums as Women in Military Service for America, located at the entrance to Arlington National Cemetery, or the National D-Day Museum in New Orleans, La., among others.

There are strict procedures for acquiring and disposing of items, Dougherty said. Museum staff members must follow U.S. Code, Title 10, Section 2572, when either acquiring through exchange or disposing of any excess obsolete equipment, which allows the government to give items to nonprofit museums, local governments and veterans groups. — *SFC Lisa Beth Snyder*

"It will also form a bridge between the Army and the citizens it serves, since the Army is the service that has traditionally touched the lives of more Americans than any other service," he said.

The items for the national museum will come from the Army Museum System's storage facilities and not from the existing Army museums.

Even though the National Army Museum doesn't exist yet, soldiers can still experience the Army's fascinating history at the 117 museum sites in the United States, Germany and Korea. For information on specific museums, go to the Army Museum System website at www.army.mil/cmh-pg/museums/museums.htm. □